



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

**YEMEN: STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND
INCREASING INCLUSIVE NATIONAL DIALOGUE (04929)
USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement #279-A-00-04-00040-00, under the Leader
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I. SUMMARY

Yemen has long considered itself at the forefront of democratic progress in the Middle East, yet elected representatives to the legislative branch lack the skills necessary to challenge the traditional supremacy of the executive. Bills are introduced by the executive and adopted by parliament with little attention and few modifications. A lack of basic awareness about the role of parliament in the checks and balances of a democracy, the strong grip of the parliamentary leadership on procedures in parliament, and the minimal role of the opposition parties in guiding and supporting opposition members of parliament (MPs) has allowed the executive to maintain its domination. However, a cadre of newly elected MPs have recently joined a small number of reform minded experienced and re-elected members to show unity in checking government authority; these newly elected MPs are younger and better educated than their predecessors, and have a greater awareness of the benefits of good governance. There is a growing potential for the parliament to play a more active role in the political process. If parliament does not effectively serve its representative function and perform its constitutional role, citizens could lose faith in the country's emerging democratic system.

Within this context, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) launched the Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions and Increasing Inclusive National Dialogue program in October 2004 to address issues facing Yemen's parliament by providing a series of trainings for reform-minded MPs and select committees and establishing a legislative resource center for research and public debate. This program seeks to meet the following objectives:

- To strengthen core skills of Members of parliament, particularly democratically reform-minded MPs, in such areas as assessing legislation, identifying policy priorities, working in coalitions, constituency outreach, media relations, executive oversight and representation; and

- To develop resource capabilities of parliamentary committees in such areas as legislative research and consultation, obtaining specialized input, and modifying legislation.

To meet these objectives, NDI undertook the following activities, meetings and consultations during the past quarter:

- Held regular meetings with MPs, the international donor and diplomatic community, and political party leaders to:
 - Assess how parliamentary programs can improve Yemen’s standing under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) indicators; and
 - Share democratic development challenges and best practices with international counterparts;
- Inaugurated the Good Governance Forum to:
 - Increase knowledge of components of good governance for members of parliament, political party leaders, and civil society activists;
 - Increase the ability of members of parliament to implement tools of good governance; and
 - Share best practices within Yemen and across the Persian Gulf region;
- Inaugurated the Parliamentary Technical Training series to build the skills and capacities of parliamentarians to affect their duties in the legislature; and
- Conducted computer skills training for members of Parliament and their staff.

II. BACKGROUND

Under the Yemeni Constitution, the parliament possesses considerable power, enjoying constitutional provisions necessary to perform the full-range of parliamentary functions. The president has only a limited suspension veto, and parliament can withhold confidence in the government upon its installation. Parliament must approve the government’s annual budget, and controls its own internal funds. Yet, a large gap exists between the constitutional power of the parliament and its exercise of that power - a gap attributable to a lack of knowledge, inadequate resources and the dominance of the executive branch over parliament. Members of parliament (MPs) complain that they possess only limited (or no) staff, office space and equipment with which to conduct research and carry out committee responsibilities. Committee staff is chosen by the parliamentary leadership and few have the professional qualifications necessary to serve committees effectively.

The leadership of parliament has shown little interest in developing parliament as a professional, independent institution. Although the speaker of the parliament is from the opposition party, *Islah*, he rarely stands in opposition to the executive. Ruling party MPs generally fall in line with the party leadership while opposition MPs are only weakly connected to their parties and have generally failed to offer alternatives to government legislation¹.

¹ NDI’s political party program will provide training and skill building on policy and caucus development. Recent trainings have built upon the opposition of parliament to proposed changes in oil subsidies, focused on the relationship between parties and parliament, and developed conflict mitigation and negotiation skills.

Despite these challenges, the parliament can represent an important institution of change in Yemen if supported and strengthened. Many of the newly elected members are younger and better educated than their predecessors, and have a greater awareness of the benefits of good governance. In addition, there exists a core group of democratically reform-minded MPs from the ruling and opposition parties who have expressed their desire to play an active role in encouraging organized and inclusive political dialogue. The active and very public objection of parliament to the announcement of the government plan to sell stock in the country's petroleum sector illustrates the Members' growing willingness to challenge the *status quo*.

Parliament continued to exert its power in December 2004, when it delayed passage of the government proposed budget for 2005. The budget faced difficulty in approval by parliament for the first time in the parliamentary history of Yemen. Approval was delayed because of parliamentary opposition to government proposals for lifting subsidies on fuel products; diesel prices would more than double as a result, compounding problems of poverty and unemployment. The organizers of the parliamentary opposition, which included MPs from all parties, demanded that the government first prove it was serious about reform and fighting corruption before parliament would allow fuel prices to be raised. In the end, the government agreed to begin its proposed plan of reform as set out by MPs as a condition to raising fuel prices; a timetable was written that sets out reform steps towards better governance which will be included in the parliamentary report.

In its current session, parliament discussed and passed two important items: one which provides clarity and definition to parliamentary procedure and another that provides for a higher base salary for the civil service. The latter was an initiative demanded of parliament as a condition to pass the government's 2005 budget and address excessively low wages that encourage petty corruption. The former, an initiative instigated by NDI's core group of parliamentarians, provides detail to rules which existed in vague generality and were often abused. As amended (the President has yet to sign the law) the bylaws also provide a provision for defeated or former members of parliament to receive an annual salary - in effect a pension scheme where no formal pension plan exists. This provides some security to parliamentarians and encourages members to act for interests other than those of the political leadership, to which their financial stability had been tied. Other important details contained in this legislation include:

- Election of the President of the Presidium (in effect the Speaker of Parliament) every two years;
- Election of the three Vice-presidents of the Presidium every two years;
- Election of Heads of Standing Parliamentary Committees every two years; and
- Provision for committees to call ministers directly to testify, comment, or clarify before committee meetings. Formerly this practice required the consent of and action by the Presidium.

Equally encouraging, President Saleh has publicly committed the government to leading democratic development in the region, a claim reiterated at the Conference on Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in January 2003. One plank of the Sana'a Declaration issued by participants during the Inter-Governmental Regional Conference on Democracy, Human

Rights and the Role of the International Criminal Court in January 2004 commits the participating governments to “strengthen democracy and pluralism and the establishment of elected legislative bodies to represent popular will and assuring the fair representation of all sectors of society.” There are democratically reform-minded persons in all sectors of society in Yemen; in civil society, political parties, media, as well as in parliament. Reform-minded MPs can play a leadership role in fostering, organizing, and framing debate around policy choices facing the nation.

In September 2004, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) invited Yemen to apply for funding under its Threshold Country program (TCP). The TCP is designed to provide countries that have demonstrated a commitment to improving governance, health and education, and economic conditions, but have not yet reached the required measures under MCC indicators to qualify for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) assistance. Yemen submitted a TCP concept paper in early 2005 that emphasized improving the investment climate in the country to improve quality of life, increase employment, and increase tax revenue that will enable further reforms. The MCC approved the preliminary plan and requested a full proposal from Yemen.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Parliamentary Development - Meetings and Consultations

NDI hosted a meeting with Assistant Deputy Minister Jalal Yacoub of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) and a group of parliamentarians to discuss the government’s strategic plan to meet the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s goals. The Assistant Deputy Minister briefly presented the rationale for the strategic plan to improve the investment climate in Yemen and highlighted the important role Parliament can play not only in promoting a better investment climate, but also in improving the inner workings of the Parliament. Strengthening Parliament would help raise Yemen’s indicators under the Ruling Justly category, the category in which Yemen requires the greatest improvement to become eligible for MCA assistance. The group of parliamentarians with whom NDI works views the strategic plan as leverage to move for greater reform within Parliament and enthusiastically received the meeting with Jalal Yacoub. The MPs began to think strategically about short-term and long-term objectives. NDI will work with the Parliamentary Program participants to develop the short and long term strategic plan to assist parliament in achieving tangible results which will improve Yemen’s MCA indicators. Further, NDI will discuss with the international donor community the need to convey to the Yemeni government the importance of raising indicators not just to achieve MCA status, but to improve the health of the state in general.

Subsequently, NDI met again with Jalal Yacoub and Oliver Wilcox, USAID Democracy and Governance Advisor, to discuss potential parliamentary reforms to incorporate into Yemen’s Threshold Program plan. Yacoub and Wilcox expressed interest in large, visible reforms with significant impact on improving governance, accountability and transparency, or democracy in general. Discussion revolved around the parliamentary committees, with particular attention to the finance committee. NDI provided the assessment that the finance committee is currently overwhelmed with responsibilities, has insufficiently trained staff, and is deliberately undermined by government reporting requirements. To respond to these deficiencies, NDI

suggested the committee's functions should be divided with other relevant committees and a committee responsible for parliament's internal affairs and economy be established with the responsibility for working with the presidium to develop the parliamentary budget and establish regulations, oversight and enforcement for member and committee spending. The discussion also addressed deficiencies in MPs' relations and communications with constituents. NDI highlighted the lack of regularized forms of communication and access to mass media as primary obstacles to efficient and effective constituent relations. Wilcox appeared to like NDI's recommendations, and NDI offered to assist, as much as the Institute is able, MOPIC and USAID in achieving their reform objectives. NDI plans to meet further to discuss potential activities.

At the request of the Ambassador of the Netherlands, NDI provided assistance in arranging meetings with Yemeni parliamentarians, political party members, and civil society activists for a delegation of MPs from The Hague and the Helsinki Foundation. As part of the program, NDI hosted a roundtable meeting at its offices to discuss the development of democracy and the state of human rights in Yemen and to identify areas of cooperation and potential assistance. Ten Yemeni political leaders and two representatives of the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD) human rights organization met with the Dutch delegation. In their presentations to the delegation, the Yemeni participants identified several issues in democratic development in Yemen, including the poor quality of political party nominees due to faulty selection processes, the lack of access to information for parliament and individual MPs, and difficulties pertaining to the elections system and its manipulation by the ruling party. Regarding human rights, MPs explained that they can defend human rights in their individual capacities by questioning and interrogation of the government. The Yemeni participants plan to prepare a paper on types of assistance the Europeans could provide to support democracy in Yemen.

At the request of U.S. Ambassador Thomas Krajeski, NDI arranged a meeting for the Ambassador with progressive-reformist parliamentarians for an informal discussion at the NDI offices. The open and candid discussion with seven MPs focused primarily on politics, mechanics of Parliament, and the role of the U.S. in democratic development in Yemen. Ambassador Krajeski opened the discussion by asking for an assessment of parliamentary activity, including the recent amendments to the house by-laws. The MPs responded that the most controversial provision was the re-election process for the presidium. The initial draft of the amendments to the by-laws intended that candidates for presidium positions stand for election every three years; however the ruling GPC used their overwhelming majority in parliament to shorten the period to two years. This discussion has taken place against the backdrop of tensions which ebb and flow between the President and the Speaker of Parliament. Many observers believe that the ruling GPC is using the shorter election period as leverage with the Speaker (who is also the head of the leading opposition party *Islah*) to discourage *Islah* from fielding or supporting a credible presidential candidate in the 2006 Presidential elections. Whatever the machinations or motives, reformist parliamentarians view the election term as a means of making the Presidium more accountable to the Members.

An MP then asked the Ambassador for his view on Yemen's democracy. Ambassador Krajeski replied that the U.S. has deep respect for President Saleh as he has maintained stability

in Yemen and therefore the region. He added that America's best allies are democracies, because they tend to be stable, and that Yemen's democracy is still in its formative stages. The Ambassador acknowledged some of the challenges facing Yemen, but also emphasized that the U.S. does not intend to interfere in internal issues. The U.S. will monitor the upcoming elections and will measure future democratic development beginning with the presidential election, expressing concern that the incumbent has previously received 97% of the vote. The MPs agreed with much of the Ambassador's assessment, but questioned the United States' public praising of Yemeni democracy when indicators of the MCC point to failures in transparency, accountability, and control of corruption. The Ambassador proposed that they meet again when he returns from the U.S. in July to discuss these issues further.

NDI facilitated the arrangement of an interview for *Argus*, a privately held energy industry publisher, on the Hunt Oil Block 18 extension and amended agreement with MP Ali Ashal, a member of the Oil and Gas Standing Committee. The interview demonstrated some items of interest that will inform the media relations and strategic communications training component of the Parliamentary Technical Training program.

The Yemen chapter of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) received official recognition by the Parliamentary Centre in Canada where GOPAC's headquarters are located. This recognition represents the culmination of NDI's consultations with MPs on the process of incorporating chapter, as well as how to move that process forward. There is a regional chapter of GOPAC located in Lebanon, but the Yemeni parliamentarians sought to establish a local chapter to demonstrate their commitment to and aid their reform efforts to fight corruption.

Good Governance Forum

NDI hosted the first in a series of good governance fora at the Democracy Development Center on April 14. Yemeni parliamentarians have a vague understanding of what good governance means. For some it is simply the absence of corruption; others have not developed an understanding of the concept. This forum was designed to present a definition of good governance with some description of its constituent elements and to provide a base understanding of good governance concepts. Approximately 50 participants attended the forum, roughly three-quarters of whom were members of parliament, in addition to several party officials, representatives of women's groups, academics, media, and a few parliamentary staff. Each group had representation that reflected the political spectrum.

Panelists from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), MOPIC, and NDI engaged in a discussion during the first part of the forum on two questions: 1) What is good governance? and 2) Why is good governance important for Yemen? The second portion was an open discussion framed around the responsibilities of the participants and what actions they could take individually and collectively to ensure that principles of good governance are promoted in Yemen.

To assess the impact of the forum, NDI submitted two surveys to the participants – one at the outset and one at the conclusion. At the beginning of the program, people used general terms

and concepts to define good governance as an element of democracy, but after the sessions concluded, participants defined good governance by its more precise constituents, e.g. rule of law, accountability, and transparency. Rather than think of good governance as an ethereal concept vaguely attached to the concept of democracy, participants saw it as a necessary element of a functional democracy. NDI asked the participants to take the materials and concepts they received in the workshop to their workplaces and daily practices. Anecdotally, on a visit to parliament the week after the forum, an NDI staff member observed two MPs, one of whom had not attended the program, carrying the folders distributed at the forum.

An unintended outcome of the forum was that many participants heard for the first time the government's plan for meeting MCC targets. Several participants appreciated the candor, honesty, and sincerity expressed by the MOPIC representative and approached him to engage in further discussion about the Yemen Threshold Program and MCA.

A second good governance forum on Transparency and Accountability was held June 21-23 for Yemeni parliamentarians and included the participation of Bahraini and Kuwaiti parliamentarians. The day prior to the forum, the Bahraini and Kuwaiti delegations had informal meetings with the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) and the General People's Congress (GPC), the ruling party. The luncheon with the JMP focused on a discussion of the common ground the parliamentarians have as Arabs and the common issues and challenges they face in improving governance in their respective countries. While the Bahrainis pointed to the example both Kuwait and Yemen provide as the oldest developing democracies in the region, the Yemenis were quick to acknowledge the challenges they are facing in institutionalizing democracy. Of particular concern is the dominance of the GPC over the political system. The parliamentarians further discussed their shared challenges of combating corruption, educating the public on democracy and human rights, and exercising the rights provided to them as legislators under the law. The collaboration of the diverse parties of the JMP served as a strong example in particular for the Bahrainis, one of whom expressed his amazement at seeing the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) at the same table with *Islah*. The subsequent meeting with the GPC consisted of a less spirited discussion dominated by the GPC members who were not inclined to be candid in their discussion of relations with the opposition parties or the state of democracy in Yemen.

Sheikh al-Ahmar, President of the Presidium in Parliament, opened the forum the following day. The first portion focused on executive oversight. When the discussion opened, remarks by Bahraini and Kuwaiti participants were primarily positive and focused on the theoretical aspects of accountability and transparency: in both countries parliamentarians are officially allowed to question and investigate ministers, though practice differs from what MPs are legally permitted to do. One of the Bahrainis highlighted this gap in law and practice, stressing the limits it places on parliamentary effectiveness and opened the floor for candid discussion. Participants raised issues of term limits, corruption, and



the need for public oversight laws. The role of women also arose during the discussion, and a member of the GPC women's committee took the opportunity to talk briefly about the Women's Network in Yemen. A woman from *Islah* stressed that it is not enough to have token women in parliament, but that public perception about women's participation must be changed. The session concluded with NDI presenting two questions for thought and discussion at the *Diwan* meeting in the afternoon: 1) is it possible for the parliamentarians to educate the public as to their commitment to reform and change? and 2) if not, would their initiatives succeed if presented within a national instead of regional context?

Participants from each of the countries presented papers on good practices in governance on the second day of the forum. The Kuwaiti paper emphasized that there will be no social or economic reform without political reform and highlighted corruption as a primary challenge for Kuwait. In combating corruption the Kuwaiti parliament has conducted 27 investigations, six of which involved ministers from the ruling family; three of those ministers resigned. The Yemeni paper opened with a discussion of the laws and articles in Yemen that guarantee transparency and accountability and then highlighted the gaps between law and practice. The paper highlighted the parliamentary action regarding the Hunt oil company and its ability to prevent the government from providing rights to a foreign oil company in block 18, as well as other parliamentary moves that have blocked government action. The Bahraini paper spoke more to the legal provisions for transparency and accountability, rather than the actualities of parliamentary action. During the discussion period after the presentations, one Bahraini emphasized the need for personal responsibility on the part of parliamentarians, stating that it was up to MPs to start using the tools they have to exercise oversight. One Yemeni made a particularly insightful statement that MPs need to distinguish between transparency and accountability: transparency is the position and accountability is the interest.



The workshop concluded with a statement prepared and signed by the participants the previous day (Appendix 2). It declared that the forum formed the foundation of cooperation

among the three parliaments and that the participants are committed to raising the issue of transparency and accountability wherever and whenever they are able.

Parliamentary Technical Training

The Parliamentary Technical Training series intends to build the skills and capacities of parliamentarians to affect their duties in Parliament. NDI held the first workshop of the series on April 21 to provide time-management training. The training not only focused on transferring time-management techniques and knowledge, it also set out to modify values and attitudes. Time management training cannot be understood without understanding the dominant cultural attitudes that make this training unique and peculiar in the Yemeni cultural setting. MPs who are currently members of NDI's Parliamentary Program informal advisory group have frequently expressed that they are persistently challenged with the ability to adjust to their actual functions in Parliament. This workshop was designed for this group to improve the quality of their time and equip them with the skills necessary to overcome the accumulation of their functions. The time-management training session was set to develop skills and aptitudes in terms of creativeness and quality performance.

A significant minority of the twelve parliamentarians held initial skepticism that they had any chance to control their time. They explained further that they are in a society that has no respect for time. These expressed attitudes gradually changed as the program progressed, and participants realized the value of time-management and planning. By the end of the workshop, the parliamentarians had analyzed their time usage, developed a prioritized task list, developed a plan of activities for the upcoming week, and discussed how to deal with time wasters. The training utilized primarily participatory approaches and provided hand-outs in Arabic to acquaint participants with the new terms and concepts that are part of time-management techniques.

NDI conducted a follow-up evaluation with the parliamentarians to ascertain how the participants had implemented the techniques and approaches suggested in the workshop. Approximately 60% of the parliamentarians had attempted to use the to-do list and had met with a significant degree of success. Some had successfully applied techniques to mitigate the effects of time wasters.

Democracy Development Center - Computer Trainings

In addition to serving as the venue for NDI's political party and parliamentary program activities, the Democracy Development Center (DDC) was also home to intense computer literacy training for MPs, parliamentary staff and political party leaders. The first group of computer literacy trainees completed the three modules of instruction at the end of April. The second group, consisting of seven parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, had their first course May 9 – 11. In total, the computer course, sponsored by the US Embassy's Public Affairs Department, will be delivered to four groups: the first with 20 participants and the following three with ten participants each. The fourth group is reserved for the party and women's participation program. The first two modules – Basic Concepts of Information Technology and Using the Computer and Managing Files – were delivered in two five hour sessions over one week and the remaining module – Internet Research Techniques – was delivered over three days.

The initial sessions were delivered through the University of Technology; the sessions for the remaining three groups were hosted at NDI's Democracy Development Center.

In addition to those offered in partnership with the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Department and the University of Technology, NDI conducted smaller ad hoc training sessions for students of varying skill levels and with limited availability. These computer literacy trainings aid students by providing them with the skills and confidence to be able to use computers and the internet as research tools. Surveys of students indicate that additional training is required focusing on skill development in particular software, e.g. word processing and spreadsheets. NDI has received positive feedback from students, including emails from trainees who had no previous experience with computers at all.

The DDC will develop further computer literacy trainings based upon the feedback received from participants. The trainings will become a regular feature in the center, providing for more individualized and targeted trainings.

IV. RESULTS

Result 1: MPs developed skills to more effectively execute their legislative roles and positions.

Indicators:

- 60% of parliamentarians participating in the time-management workshop successfully implemented techniques learned;
- Parliamentarians gained a comprehensive understanding of components of good governance and recognized them as a necessary element of a functional democracy;
- Parliamentarians and their staff developed practical computer and internet research skills; and
- Parliamentarians are seeking broader policy information and working with NDI to develop research and analysis skills.

Result 2: MPs are developing regional networks to strengthen parliamentary practice and for combating systemic corruption.

Indicators:

- MPs from Yemen shared best practices with and learned from parliamentarians from Bahrain and Kuwait;
- Parliamentarians established a cooperative association with their colleagues in Bahrain and Kuwait to promote transparency and accountability in Yemen and the Persian Gulf region; and
- GOPAC Yemen received official recognition by the Parliamentary Centre where GOPAC's headquarters are located.

Result 3: MPs took part in open dialogues on MCC indicators and parliamentary reform.

Indicators:

- Parliamentarians discussed the rationale for Yemen’s Threshold Country program proposal with senior representatives of MOPIC;
- Parliamentarians began developing with NDI a short- and long-term strategic plan to achieve tangible reforms related to Yemen’s MCC indicators; and
- Parliamentarians initiated reforms to their parliamentary by-laws, with advice and research support from NDI.

Result 4: Parliamentarians are working in greater numbers and with improved effectiveness to review and propose legislation.

Indicators:

- NDI Yemen’s core group of parliamentary program participants continues to grow; and
- Key NDI program participants are actively engaged in the work of the standing committees and consulting regularly with NDI as they develop committee reports.

Result 5: Increased public discussion on the need for better governance practices.

Indicators:

- The Joint Meeting Parties developed and released a political reform document;
- Participants in NDI’s Good Governance forum were instrumental in developing recommendations for the Central Organization for Control and Auditing (COCA) to fall under the jurisdiction of and be solely accountable to parliament; and
- Parliamentarians and political activists are using the language and concepts discussed of good governance.

V. EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

Through the good governance forums, MPs are demonstrating an understanding and interest in exerting their authority in parliament, as well as in hearing input from civil society, constituents, and others on national policy issues. With the help of NDI, they will have to continue to work on holding consultative discussions regularly and implementing not only the theory, but also the practice, of good governance in their parliamentary work.

The Memorandum of Understanding that resulted from the transparency and accountability workshop is a good step towards highlighting Yemen’s progress in democratic reform among the Gulf countries, as well as attending to areas of improvement. Building relationships with MPs from other Gulf countries will also help provide support to Yemeni MPs as they try to take on more executive oversight and push for reforms to address corruption.

Through the activities of NDI, MPs and party leaders are also beginning to better communicate and respond to each other. NDI's core group of parliamentary program participants are demonstrating to a less experienced and tentative group that participating in NDI programming has benefits, builds capacity, and provides the "protection" of working with a larger group of colleagues. NDI's political party and parliamentary program will continue to work towards integrating activities that further build these relationships.

The interview NDI facilitated for MP Ali Ashal with *Argus* helped highlight components that will be required in the media relations and strategic communications training portion of the Parliamentary Technical Training program. First, Ashal's ability to provide thoughtful and reasoned answers to the journalist's questions, including the leading ones, and his commitment to loftier principles of nationhood rather than partisan remarks indicate that he may be a useful training assistant in demonstrating how to develop responses to media questions. Second, Ashal's failure to ask basic questions about the nature of the interview, the story on which the interviewer was working, and the interviewer's background and to negotiate ground rules at the outset indicate that these may be areas to address during training. Further, improved follow-up techniques to maintain relations with the media and insure accuracy will need to be included in the training program.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

During the upcoming quarter, NDI will continue to work collaboratively with parliamentarians in giving form and substance to the GOPAC chapter in Yemen and with the informal Parliamentary Advisory Group. The Institute will hold monthly organizational training and support programs to institutionalize the GOPAC chapter.

Under the Parliamentary Technical Training program, NDI will conduct in the next quarter a workshop on Parliamentary roles and procedures and one on strategic planning. Future sessions will include legislative caucuses, constituency relations, and media relations. The Good Governance forum will continue with a regional program on popular participation and decentralization scheduled for the end of the next or beginning of the following quarter.

The DDC will continue to develop computer literacy trainings for parliamentarians and students based upon the feedback received from participants. The trainings will become a regular feature in the center. Additionally, the DDC will conduct training-of-trainers under the computer literacy program to expand the number of technically capable parliamentary staff.

Abdulqawi al Qaisi, the secretary of Sheik Abdullah, has drafted a book on the Yemen parliament, which NDI thinks will be useful in its work. Al Qaisi also intends for the book to be used for high school and university students. NDI has met twice with students (once with high school and once with university students) to assess whether it is appropriate for such use; generally, the students thought the book was very informative. NDI is working with al Qaisi to identify potential funding sources for translation and printing. This text will be of particular importance as NDI works with the Presidium to establish a sustainable Member Orientation and Professional Development program within parliament. In addition to the books being a valuable

resource, NDI's assistance will help the Institute to strengthen its relationship with an important conduit to the speaker of the Parliament.

Appendix 1

NDI IN THE MEDIA

Regional workshop on wise governance forum wrapped up

Yasser Mohammed Al-Mayyasi, Yemen Times

SANA' A- June 23- A workshop on wise governance forum was concluded on Thursday in Sana'a involving many delegations from some Arab countries including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The event was organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

The forum, inaugurated by Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hussein al-Ahmar Parliament Speaker, reviewed a number of work papers on transparency and questioning and the experiences of the Arab country (Yemen), particularly the parliamentary aspects.

All the participants agreed on the establishment of a union association for MPs in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf, and volunteers can join the association.

The concluding statement of the forum stressed on the importance of maturing awareness of MPs in the region and training them how to play their role in auditing and quizzing the executive apparatuses.

Participants in the workshop listened to representatives of political parties at the Yemeni Parliament, mainly the ruling People's General Congress, the *Islah* and Nasserite parties.

The work papers made a mention of some obstacles hindering the parliamentary experience in the Arab countries and advocated for reforms in current systems of governance as well as amendment of laws to enable them to reach the wise governance and transparency as a cardinal principle for democratic governance.

A number of attendants emphasized that many parliaments in the Arab regions can not audit or quiz their governments since they are usually dominated by the ruling parties.

The attendants insisted on the importance of a balance inside the parliament and the participation of all the political forces in the parliament.

They believed that the parliament's efforts in monitoring are somehow incompetent and it is possible to make any change.

 **Al-Ahmar says parliament's role needed for good governance**

SANA'A, June 22 (Saba) - Speaker of the Parliament Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar confirmed on Wednesday importance of the role of parliaments to bolster good governance.

Addressing a regional workshop on the good governance, al-Ahmar said parliamentarians from different countries should exchange parliamentary experiences in democratization.

The workshop, organized by the American Democratic Institute, was attended by MPs from Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen.

"These meetings leave always a positive influences in the public performance of our parliamentary councils and help enrich the democratic practice," said al-Ahmar.

Al-Ahmar underlined importance of cooperation between all the political forces in society to enhance the democracy and make use of the pioneer experiences in the democratic field.

NA/KM

Resource: SABA

Regional workshop on transparency and accountability in Yemen

BY FATIMA FOUD
FOR THE YEMEN TIMES

The National Democratic Institute in Yemen (NDI) held a Regional Workshop on Transparency and Accountability as a part of their series of discussion forums in Good Governance. The workshop was held in Hadda Hotel last week on the 22nd and the 23rd of June. The event was chaired by Sheikh Abdulla Al Ahmer who has emphasized on the role of the parliamentarians in the protection of public good and the importance of focusing on good governance systems that will empower the people. The workshop hosted a number of parliamentarians from Yemen, Bahrain, and Kuwait. There was also a representative from the various political parties in Yemen, local news agencies and human rights activists.

The contributions from the parliamentarians emphasized the importance of Transparency and Good Governance in the region. The crowd agreed on unifying the efforts of all the political parties in the parliament in order to achieve consensus on issues that will be beneficial to the Yemeni citizen. They have also emphasized on the importance of sharing experiences between the parliamentarians in the region. One



of the recommendations that emerged was the suggestion of creating a parliamentarians network in the Arabian Peninsula to facilitate experience exchange and increase the parliamentarians ability to engage with constructive dialogues among each other and

towards the citizens.

This workshop is one of many NDI works in the field of enhancing the capacity of parliamentarians and bridge understanding between the Parliamentarians and the citizens by fostering an open transparent dialogue.

July 4th edition Yemen Times



Policy Line

by Fatima Fouad
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A few good parliamentarians

There is a common misconception that Yemeni parliamentarians do not know how much power they possess; stating this is not only naïve, but it is a serious slap in the face of democracy. If the support of some thousand people who elected a certain parliamentarian as a representative is considered useless, then we ought to ask ourselves why we need elections in the first place.

In an impoverished country like Yemen where illiteracy prevails, many people do not have the assertiveness to tackle public officials and question them. They often see the parliament as a body that is loyal to the government rather than a true representative of the public. Although Yemeni citizens exercise their right to vote, few of them understand the mutual roles and responsibilities that need to be played post-elections.

The magnitude of the authority that can be exerted by the parliamentarians is significant; it is however limited and constrained for many reasons. The power of the parliament corresponds directly to the level of communication between the Members of Parliament (MP) and their constituencies. Currently, there is an absence of a strategic and clear agenda of the MPs that the wider public can follow and hold their elected officials accountable to.

There are also a number of other issues that prevent the parliament from reaching its full potential. Such concerns include unfocused and meandering legislative sessions and the ambiguity of parliamentarians' agendas. Additionally,

most MPs lack strategic communication with both the government and citizens and have limited incentives for parties to work together within the parliament. Furthermore, there is a lack of gender diversity.

In a perfect world the parliament would not simply be drafting, approving or opposing legislation, controlling the government's budget and making pro-poor decisions. The parliament would move beyond these steps to communicating regularly and directly with citizens, demanding information from the various ministries and publicizing wrongdoing to hold the government accountable. The parliament would be a legislator, debater and scrutinizer.

To be fair, the Yemeni parliament has been able to challenge the government in some cases of corruption and publicize it to the media. However, it has failed to investigate a significant number of issues. The hurdles facing the parliament in this endeavor are constrained by the bureaucracy and the quality of administration in Yemen.

Another important issue that should not be overlooked is the fact that 80% of the parliament belongs to one political party. This is capable of causing a bias in some issues and undermines the efficiency of the parliament in holding the government accountable.

In a recent paper presented by MP Mr. Sakhr Al-Wageeh at the regional workshop organized by the National Democratic Institute, he mentioned that the delay in receiving requested data from various ministries hinders parliamentary committees from performing

their duties. He also indicated that more serious impediments arise when some ministers abstain from being questioned by the parliamentarians. There are a number of pending cases in the parliament that are ignored by the very people who are supposed to be responsible for implementing the law. Other MPs like Mr. Faisal Abu Raas have emphasized the importance of building a network with other parliamentarians in the region that can enhance the capacity of MPs to develop and expand their role.

However, the need for citizens to contribute to the mandate and strategies of their MPs is more often than not left unattended. This should not come as a surprise as the institutions that can challenge or empower the parliament such as the media and civic organizations do not play a strategic role in this political game.

The role of the Yemeni parliament is developing, but it remains undervalued. Yemeni parliamentarians are among the most qualified leaders in society and they hold substantial potential to further the aspirations of the people. However, the parliament should not expect to have any power if they fail to communicate effectively with the Yemeni citizens. The current parliament is under pressure not only to deliver results, but to build a shared vision and a civil identity among all the segments of the Yemeni society, putting aside political, social or tribal affiliations. The urgency of this task is one that the parliament has not yet been fully achieved but which there remains high hopes for.

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Appendix 2

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING GULF REGION PARLIAMENTARY UNION ASSOCIATION

Preamble:

Parliamentarians from Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen, attending the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs' "Good Governance Forum Series" in Sana'a, Yemen, resolved to create a regional association of parliamentarians. The objectives of this regional association are to:

- Work cooperatively to advance good governance initiatives;
- Share parliamentary best practices;
- With the utmost integrity, provide ethical and responsible representation to the people of the Gulf Region; and
- Pursue, promote, and strengthen democratic developments which are consistent with Islamic and Arabian principles.

Resolution:

We, the undersigned, commit to work cooperatively to establish a Gulf Region Parliamentary Union Association. The objectives of this association will be to advance democratic governance in accordance with the ethical principles of Islam, and with the highest integrity and respect for the aspirations of Arab peoples.

A steering committee comprised of elected members of houses of representation from Kuwait, Bahrain, and Yemen will be formed to develop the charter which will guide this association. It is agreed that this charter will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Association membership shall be comprised of democratically elected representatives from the Gulf Region;
- The association will serve to foster cooperation between members of parliaments and houses of representation;
- The association will promote integrity, and members will be bound by a code of ethical conduct;
- The association will only be supported by parliaments, houses of representation, parliamentarians, and parliamentary associations; and
- The association will pursue, promote and strengthen democratic developments which are consistent with Islamic and Arabian principles.